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Moscow's New "Peace Offensive" Toward Japan [redacted]

An Intelligence Memorandum

Information available as of 10 May 1982 has been used in the preparation of this report.

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Moscow's New "Peace Offensive" Toward Japan [redacted]

Summary

The Soviet Union is attempting to open a new dialogue with the Japanese on economic and security issues. Moscow apparently hopes to exploit differences between Japan and the United States on the proper level of Japanese defense spending. It is seeking to encourage pacifist, antinuclear sentiment in Japan to make it more difficult for the Suzuki government to convince the Japanese public of the need for increased defense spending. The Soviets also are attempting to exploit Japan's distaste for economic sanctions and its differences with the United States over the US-Japanese trade imbalance in order to gain more access to Japanese technology and investment. Nevertheless, the Northern Territories issue remains a major impediment to any significant improvement in relations. The Japanese Government is aware of Soviet objectives and is not likely to change its defense and foreign policies as a result of Moscow's tactics.

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Moscow's New "Peace Offensive" Toward Japan [redacted]

Soviet Initiatives

The Soviets have taken several initiatives over the past five months to put a more positive face on their poor relations with Japan. The thrust of this campaign has been to portray Moscow as a "reasonable" partner with whom Tokyo should engage in a new dialogue. The Soviets have, at the same time, toned down their criticism of Japan's foreign policy. They also seem to have made a special effort to avoid major gaffes in their dealings with the Japanese. This approach is a marked departure from the USSR's frequently arrogant behavior toward Japan in the past. [redacted]

Soviet Premier Tikhonov's February interview in *Asahi*—perhaps the most influential Japanese daily—was one of the most prominent actions taken in the broad "peace offensive."[1] Tikhonov reiterated, in a more positive fashion, some of the themes that Foreign Minister Gromyko, other Soviet officials, and the Soviet media have stressed in recent months. [redacted]

President Brezhnev, speaking at Tashkent on 24 March, enlarged upon the Soviet position. He called on the Japanese to reconsider Moscow's proposal for confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the Far East—initially made in February 1981—and reminded them that bilateral CBMs could be negotiated. The latter point had been made privately in Tokyo and Beijing last August and in subsequent Soviet commentaries. Brezhnev's statement,

[1] Tikhonov's remarks were also aimed at other audiences, including the United States and China, but the choice of *Asahi* indicates Japan was the primary target. [redacted]

however, was the first public and authoritative proposal of such talks with the Japanese. Significantly, Brezhnev omitted the standard assertion that because the Japanese are to blame for bilateral strains, it is up to Tokyo to make the first move to improve relations. His silence on this point suggests a new Soviet willingness to meet the Japanese part way.

The Soviet media have followed up on Brezhnev's initiative by citing the positive responses of Japanese Diet members, trade union officials, and other public figures, as well as articles in the Japanese press. They have simultaneously charged that the main purpose of Secretary of Defense Weinberger's trip to Japan in late March was to press for increased defense spending. These commentaries have contrasted the US effort to bolster the "defense perimeter" in the Far East with Soviet "peace proposals."

The Soviets had signaled their interest in improved relations on a number of occasions prior to the Brezhnev speech.

Meanwhile, the Soviets have intensified their efforts to achieve nuclear arms curbs and security guarantees in East Asia and the Pacific. In late February, Brezhnev—in a wide-ranging letter responding to an Australian peace movement group—suggested a US-Soviet agreement to limit military activities in the Pacific region. Replying in early March to a similar appeal from Japanese intellectuals, Brezhnev proposed a special agreement in which Moscow would pledge not to use nuclear weapons against Japan in return for a Japanese commitment to adhere to its longstanding prohibition against allowing nuclear arms on its territory. Moscow has repeatedly offered assurances that it would not use nuclear weapons

[2] The Soviets have appointed Vladimir Pavlov as Polyanskiy's successor in Tokyo.

against countries which did not produce or acquire such weapons or allow them to be deployed on their territory, but Brezhnev's statement was the first time that the Soviets had openly and directly proposed a formal agreement on the matter with Japan.

The Soviets are, at the same time, still strongly advocating a Mongolian proposal, advanced in May 1981, for a "nonaggression pact" for Asian and Pacific states. They also continue to support the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Northeast Asia. In this connection, Moscow has recently sent two arms control specialists to Japan where they had major interviews in Tokyo—presumably in order to bypass the government and get Soviet views on disarmament issues on record with the Japanese public.

Finally, the Soviets are trying to expand economic and cultural contacts with Japan.

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Moscow's Motives

One important motive for this intensified activity is Moscow's desire to persuade Japan to adopt a more independent policy toward the United States, especially on defense matters. The Soviets hope to exploit differences between Tokyo and Washington over the nature and extent of the Soviet threat and the consequent proper level for Japanese defense spending. The Soviets have, to this end, attempted to encourage in Japan the same pacifist, antinuclear thinking that is so much in evidence in Western Europe and, in this connection, to exploit existing concern over US nuclear policy. They apparently believe that US-Japanese differences regarding the nature of a Western security arrangement with China enhance their chances of dividing Tokyo and Washington.

The Soviets realize that a burgeoning peace movement in Japan would make it more difficult for Suzuki to secure increased defense spending at the expense of social programs. Brezhnev's proposal for a "nonnuclear" agreement with Japan, for example, appears designed partly to embarrass Suzuki, who is already on record against permitting nuclear weapons to transit or be based in Japan. The Prime Minister cannot accept Brezhnev's proposal without putting a further strain on Japan's security relationship

with the United States. He will, however, find it difficult to present a rationale for rejecting the proposal that will persuade the many Japanese who are opposed to nuclear arms, and he will be open to criticism by the opposition parties for failing to give Brezhnev's proposal serious consideration.

Suzuki in fact may be one of Moscow's targets. The Soviets, judging from their press commentaries, have been particularly annoyed by Suzuki's personal involvement in the campaign for the return of the Northern Territories, and they probably doubt that relations can be significantly improved as long as he remains in office. They may hope that, with their guidance, the peace movement in Japan will create serious difficulties for his government. Although Moscow probably has little hope that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will be forced from power, it may believe that another LDP leader would be preferable to Suzuki.

The Soviet "peace offensive" is only one part of Moscow's efforts to work around the United States in a period of strained bilateral relations. It is similar in several respects to recent Soviet efforts to cultivate the West Europeans. In fact, Moscow may believe that an improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations would provide some encouragement for the West Europeans to take a stand more independent of the United States in order to ease East-West tensions. Moscow's long-range goal on both fronts is for such developments ultimately to lever the United States toward adopting a more accommodating policy toward the Soviet Union.

Another major consideration is continuing Soviet interest in gaining access to Japanese technology and persuading Japan to invest in Siberia. Indeed, Western trade restrictions and Soviet domestic economic problems make this an even more important motive for Moscow. Japan showed signs last fall of moving away from its post-Afghanistan sanctions, but this prospective move was halted as a result of the introduction of martial law in Poland. The Soviets realize, however, that the Japanese have not wanted to get out in front of the West Europeans with regard to imposing sanctions. Japan's recently announced economic measures against Poland and the USSR, which bring Japan into alignment with other US allies, probably appeared to the Soviets to be no more than a reluctant concession. The Soviets have repeatedly emphasized in their public commentaries that the Japanese Government yielded to US pressure on the sanctions issue largely to reduce the likelihood of US curbs on Japanese exports. The Soviets must, at the same time, be aware of certain steps the Japanese have taken to limit the damage caused by their sanctions against the USSR, such as excluding the Sakhalin oil and natural gas development project. The Soviets apparently hope that they can encourage Japan to ease its sanctions if they make concessions to Tokyo on minor issues.

The Soviets may realize their requests earlier this year for deferment of payment on products purchased from Japan will make Tokyo even warier of expanding economic ties in the absence of a concurrent political dialogue. Nevertheless, as US-Japanese differences mount about how to rectify the trade imbalance, the Soviets appear to be signaling the Japanese again about their desirability as a trade partner. In this connection, the USSR is stressing that its economic needs complement, rather than compete with Japanese economic goals. [redacted]

Prospects

The Japanese have responded cautiously to the recent Soviet initiatives and are convinced there has been no real change in the Soviet position on the key issues dividing the two sides. The Japanese, moreover, continue to insist that, if the USSR genuinely desires improved relations with Japan, it will have to take concrete steps to create conditions conducive to such an improvement. They have, in this connection, repeatedly mentioned the need for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, a reduction of Soviet forces on Japan's Northern Territories, and Soviet agreement to discuss the territorial question. [redacted]

The Soviets are not likely to budge on any of these points but could accelerate their peace campaign by acting upon a longstanding Japanese invitation for Gromyko to visit Tokyo. They would probably seek a clarification of Japanese intentions toward the USSR before setting a date for such a trip. They will, at the least, want to see what actions Suzuki may take as a result of the special study on the "Soviet threat" that he requested last fall. [redacted]

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The Soviets will be watching for any signs that Tokyo is interested in developing a dialogue. If they perceive such signs, they could offer minor concessions to Japan while delaying a decision on a Gromyko visit. They could, for example, show flexibility on such matters as procedures for visits to Japanese graves on the Northern Islands or current restrictions on Japanese fishing in waters adjacent to that disputed territory. A new Asian arms control proposal—perhaps an extension of Brezhnev's SS-20 moratorium proposal in Europe—would also have appeal for the Japanese.

The Soviets have not been forthcoming on such issues in the past, probably because they believed that bilateral economic ties would progress despite a lack of movement on political issues. They may now be willing to make such relatively unimportant gestures in order to revive the political dialogue

[redacted]

Whatever blandishments the Soviets may use, the Northern Territories issue will remain a major impediment to improving relations, and there is little prospect of either side yielding on the issue. The locality is important both strategically and as a symbol of Moscow's success in undoing the embarrassing results of the Russo-Japanese War. Even more important, Moscow fears that a Soviet concession on this issue would encourage China and other countries to press their territorial claims against the USSR. In the absence of any major quid pro quo, no Soviet leader is likely in the foreseeable future to negotiate a territorial adjustment with Japan. This is particularly true if a leadership succession struggle is unfolding in Moscow, as no contender wants to be vulnerable to charges of being soft on national security issues.

Because of Moscow's intransigence on the Northern Territories issue, the chances of the Soviet "peace offensive" yielding a major dividend for the USSR are small. Tokyo has, for example, stressed that it can hardly take Moscow's CBM proposal seriously when the Soviet Union refuses to relinquish occupied Japanese islands, the key step necessary to build Japanese confidence in the USSR. Tokyo realizes, moreover, that Moscow wants to sow discord between Japan and the United States and China, and it will not permit the Kremlin to use problems in this triangular relationship for its own end. The Soviet motive in encouraging pacifism and antinuclear sentiments in Japan is similarly transparent to the Japanese Government. Prime Minister Suzuki is, in this connection, almost certain to reject Brezhnev's proposal for a "nonnuclear" agreement with Japan. At the same time, however, Tokyo will be continually assessing the policies of the United States and the West Europeans toward the USSR, and the Japanese will adjust their policies to those of the United States and its NATO allies.